

Infrastructure Health and Safety Association

Guidance on construction supervisor responsibilities during COVID-19

Overview

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we all need to do our part to keep workers, customers and the public safe and healthy so we can stop the spread and prepare to reopen the province, when we are ready.

Below is a set of resources, tips and best practices to help employers and employees prevent the spread of COVID-19 and work together to reopen the province.

Employers and workers in Ontario have certain duties and rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations. Employers should also review and follow any applicable directives and guidance coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Ministry of Health.

Learn more about:

- [workers' rights](#)
- [employers' responsibilities](#)

Best practices

Recognize hazards and assess risks: The first step to controlling risks in a workplace is to identify the risks. This applies to all workplace hazards, not just COVID-19. Identifying and controlling workplace hazards is required of all employers in Ontario under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) and its regulations.

Some important COVID-19 risk information includes how it is spread and what can increase the risk of a worker becoming infected. COVID-19 can be spread at the workplace in two main ways:

1. person to person – by people who are in close contact
2. by surfaces or objects – when people touch their face with contaminated hands

The level of risk in an activity will be related to the number of opportunities for transmission of the virus. This includes how close people come to each other, how many different interactions there are between people, how often people touch surfaces or objects and how long people stay in a space.

It is possible for COVID-19 to be spread by people who do not have any symptoms. This makes effective control measures very important. We must act as if everyone is infected when setting up controls.

The risk of severe health outcomes is not the same for all workers. The risk increases with age and is higher for people with [certain medical conditions](#).

Learn what symptoms of COVID-19 can be observed and look for these in your workers. Speak to workers about the symptoms and explain the importance of protecting each other from potential exposure by reporting symptoms immediately.

What are the symptoms? Symptoms range from mild, like the flu and other common respiratory infections, to severe. The most common symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- fatigue

Provide your contact information to all your workers so they can call and advise you if they or a family member is experiencing symptoms while at home and will not be coming into work to self-isolate.

Be familiar with the employer's health and safety protocols for responding to suspected COVID-19 cases.

Controls:

Infection prevention and control measures prevent the spread of the virus by breaking the chain of transmission. For example, [public health guidance](#) includes staying at least 2 metres away from others which avoids close contact; washing hands removes the virus and prevents people from touching their faces with contaminated hands.

For COVID-19 in the workplace, it is recommended that employers and business owners conduct a risk assessment to determine the most appropriate controls and actions for a particular workplace/situation. Reference the [IHSA's guide](#) on the risk assessment process to help facilitate this and review [Sample 1](#), [Sample 2](#) for examples.

Always start by considering the most effective controls first. It is best to begin by trying to eliminate the hazard – to remove it from the workplace altogether. Where that is not possible, use multiple engineering and administrative controls first to prevent the spread. Protective equipment (including personal protective equipment (PPE) and community protective equipment) should be relied on only where engineering and administrative controls do not sufficiently reduce the risk to workers.

In addition to the above recommendations, employers should determine whether personal protective equipment (PPE)* needs to be part of their hazard control plan. The need for PPE

should be based on a risk assessment taking into account environmental conditions and also take into consideration input from the local public health unit. Although proper use of PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other control measures.

- Workers must use personal protective equipment as required by their employer.
- Workers should be trained on the proper use, care and limitations of any required PPE.

*NOTE: Please be reminded that most face coverings (non-medical masks) have not been tested to a known standard and do not constitute PPE. In some circumstances, face coverings may be used as an effective means of source control, but should not be viewed as an appropriate substitute for physical distancing in the workplace.

Provide your contact information to all your workers so they can call and advise you if they or a family member is experiencing symptoms while at home and will not be coming into work to self-isolate.

Be familiar with the employer's health and safety protocols for responding to suspected COVID-19 cases.

1. Maintain physical distancing. Everyone in Ontario should be practicing physical distancing to reduce their exposure to other people. They should do their best to avoid close contact with people outside of their immediate families. Close contact includes being within two (2) meters (6 feet) of another person.

2. Reporting illness. At this time, it is recommended that any worker who has any symptoms related to cold, flu, or COVID-19 be sent home, or stay at home if they have not already arrived at work.

- Supervisors should provide their contact information to their immediate crew members, and advise the workers to call if they or a family member is experiencing any of the symptoms linked to COVID-19 before coming into work. The supervisor can then let them know whether they should self-isolate instead of coming into work.
- People who are self-isolating should seek clinical assessment over the phone; either by calling their primary care provider's office or Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000. If they need additional assessment, the primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario will direct them.
- If your worker is on site and needs immediate medical assistance, you should call 911 and mention the worker's travel history and symptoms.
- When a worker has tested positive, the supervisor should communicate with the worker to:
 - Create a list of people that this worker could have been in direct contact with that day and, if possible, in previous days.
 - Identify and create a list of locations where the worker was recently working, including common areas such as lunchrooms and washrooms.
 - Initiate immediate cleaning and disinfection of these locations since they are potentially contaminated with the COVID-19 virus.
 - Identify and create a list of tools and equipment that the worker was recently using.

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

These are also potentially contaminated by the COVID-19 virus and need to be immediately cleaned and disinfected.

- A supervisor might choose to seek guidance on this matter from the local public health unit.
- Before sending a worker home, remind the worker to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus by maintaining physical distancing practices and using proper coughing/sneezing etiquette while travelling home. This will help to keep areas they visit, as well as their vehicle, uninfected. It will also protect others if they use shared or public transportation.
- Initiate and arrange for cleaning contaminated areas, tools, and equipment to ensure the appropriate isolation, cleaning, and disinfecting processes are followed.
- Keep other personnel from accessing these areas until the cleaning and disinfectant products have achieved their contact time, as stated on the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development reporting requirements: Employers must report all known positive test results for COVID-19, to:
 - The Ministry (in writing) within four days
 - The joint health and safety representative
 - A trade union (if applicable)

3. **How to self-isolate.** Self-isolating means staying at home and avoiding contact with other people to help prevent the spread of disease to others in your home and your community.

Ontario's [Stop the spread](#) webpage provides information to assess symptoms at home (or at work), how to isolate, and, many other topics.

Evaluate:

Changes to work procedures or practices related to COVID-19 may affect the way you have routinely managed other risks in the workplace. Thus, it is recommended that you consider the various preventative measures on an ongoing basis, and review and adjust accordingly if they are not working as intended or have created new risks or challenges.

Ensure the worker is clear of their responsibility to self-isolate and seek clinical assessment over the phone, either through Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000) or by calling their primary care provider's office. If additional assessment is needed, their primary care provider or Telehealth may direct them to receive in-person care options.

It is also important to relay to the worker any financial assistance that is available to help affected workers that declare symptoms. Consider providing an information package to help any workers that are sent home to self-isolate.

Keep in contact with the worker about their health and ask to share any test results they have regarding confirmation of COVID-19. You may need to share the confirmation of COVID-19 with other workers that were sent home due to this exposure, or if permitted by health officials, inform the other workers they can end their self-isolation.

Resources

Stay updated with daily government updates:

- [Government of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)

Ontario government and agency-issued resources about COVID-19

Develop your COVID-19 workplace safety plan: Learn how you can create a plan to help protect your workers and others from novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19).

[Workplace Safety Plan](#)

The [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) is providing consistent updates on the provincial government's response to the outbreak, including:

- status of cases in Ontario
- current affected areas
- symptoms and treatments
- how to protect yourself and self-isolate
- updated Ontario news on the virus

[Public Health Ontario](#) is providing up-to-date resources on COVID-19, including:

- links to evolving public health guidelines, position statements and situational updates
- synopsis of key articles updating on the latest findings related to the virus
- recommendations for use of personal protective equipment
- information on infection prevention and control
- testing information
- other public resources

Other COVID-19 resources

[Health Canada](#) outlines the actions being taken by the Government of Canada to limit spread of the virus, as well as what is happening in provinces and communities across the country. It also maintains a live update of the number of cases by province.

The [World Health Organization](#) is updating the latest guidance and information related to the global outbreak and spread beyond Canadian borders.

It also provides the most up-to-date information on:

For more information, visit: ihsa.ca/COVID-19

- current research and development around the virus
- a COVID-19 situation “dashboard”
- emergency preparedness measures
- live media updates on the spread of the virus

This resource does not replace the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations, and should not be used as or considered legal advice. Health and safety inspectors apply the law based on the facts in the workplace.